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# The Permissibility of Nonviolence and the Concept of Just War

Srilatha Dasari, Heather Salge, WI 40



## Abstract

It does not take much more than a mere glance at one's local news channel to come to the conclusion that we live in a violent world. Most civilians are aware of major nonviolent movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Indian Independence Movement, but there are major misconceptions about the process behind them. Nonviolent resistance as an option for solving issues, from personal to global, has become strictly theoretical. Now may just be the time to make the effort to learn about what nonviolent resistance truly means, due to the fact that the choices we make today may help determine what occurs tomorrow.



## Misconceptions

History classes are generally well known for their extensive coverage of the world wars, battles, and conflicts that have shaped our society into its current form. However, the few fleeting moments in history during which nonviolent resistance succeeded on a large scale are often mentioned and subsequently dismissed. These pivotal world events are acknowledged, and as a populace we often feel accomplished knowing that the human race avoided bloodshed on some occasions, but not much thought is usually given to the strength and sacrifice it took to bring about such beneficial change. Many people assume that nonviolent resistance is a quick process that is fueled on nothing other than determination. Although, in actuality the average civil resistance campaign takes three to nine years to become effective. Nonviolence is an extensive process that is difficult to study, as it cannot really be deemed successful until the progress of a region is studied many years after its implementation.

## Violence is ...sometimes the answer

After observing the violence that has consumed our society, the fact that we now live in the most peaceful era of human history can seem pretty disturbing. What ever happened to nonviolence? Each and every human being has a theoretical "line", based on one's own morals, that justifies the use of violence once crossed. The apparent necessity of violence to achieve a goal is dependent on one's own discretion, and it can range from always to never. Furthermore, while some may be familiar with the process and potential of nonviolence, they are oftentimes deterred by the daunting tasks and sacrifices involved.

## Helpful Strategies

- A strong goal and mission statement makes it easier for civilians to identify with a cause.
- A widespread amount of support, from a cross-section of society, will help cover more ground.
- The use of multiple nonviolent methods allows many more people to participate. The only thing that may be holding some back is their schedule or ability, depending on their occupation and living conditions. A sit-in, while simple in theory, involves such a great sense of determination that makes it in no way suitable for all people.
- It is important to note that nonviolence requires determination, hard work, a strong support system, a variety of strategies, a stable foundation, and more, and it still has a relatively good chance of failing.
- Consideration of the historical time period, observance of the chance for success by assessing the opponent, acceptance that there are drawbacks, and the act of being realistic can help nonviolent movements reach their goals.



## Just War

The premise of nonviolence is that the opponent of a nonviolent resister holds value in the resister. In cases of genocide, such as the Holocaust, nonviolence would be utterly useless. This is when violence may be a necessary means to an end. Violence must only be initiated when it is morally justifiable and it is possible to succeed. It is crucial to keep in mind that just war, no matter how successful it seems, is only as good as the peace that follows it. Once war begins, it is nearly impossible to end. It is important to choose strategies, from location to weapons used, very carefully to avoid casualties.

***“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”***

***-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

## Concluding Thoughts

The decision of whether or not to utilize violence to represent a cause is not easy in the slightest. Case by case analysis has shown to be effective in minimizing harm done, because nonviolence is not a “one-size-fits-all” process. Careful consideration and thought must occur in order to even hope for the success of a nonviolent movement. However, the unfortunate reality is that no matter how much preparation or strategy is used during an attempt at nonviolent resistance, the scenario may not allow for its success. This is the point at which violence could potentially be justified. Regardless of the method of resistance chosen, it is imperative that we, as a human race, allow for the preservation of justice for the future of our society.

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